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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the sense of belonging of students at the Maine School of Science and Mathematics (MSSM), a boarding magnet school in rural Maine, with that of students at a rural consolidated public high school serving two towns. This type of structure is known as a Maine School Administrative District (SAD). The school is identified as SAD 2000. The 18-item Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale was completed by 271 students: 144 female, 127 male. Resident students numbered 183 and nonresidents 88. The students at MSSM showed a greater sense of belonging than did the students at SAD 2000. Twelve of the 18 items significantly differentiated between the students of the two schools. In looking at the breakdown of SAD 2000 students, there were no significant differences between residents and nonresidents (who had chosen to attend this high school) and no significant differences by gender within or across either group. (TD)

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Sense of Belonging in Rural Community High School and Boarding Magnet High School Students

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Introduction

In looking at the issue of sense of belonging, the question remains, can students in The Maine School of Science and Mathematics (MSSM), a boarding school in rural Maine, build a sense of belonging that compares to what is found in other rural public high schools. This paper compares the degree of belonging of the MSSM students with students from one such rural community high school.

The high school chosen for comparison is a consolidated high school serving two towns (we will name Snow and Ice). In Maine this structure is called a Maine School Administrative District (SAD). In this paper we will identify this school system as SAD 2000. One reason for looking at this school is that 27% of the students that attend are non-resident students that have made the choice to attend SAD 2000. Their parents reside in one of nine neighboring towns that only provide a kindergarten through grade eight education within their community. High school students have the choice of attending one of five area high schools. In looking at the demographics of the two towns that make up SAD 2000 one finds:

Town	Population	Per capita income	% below poverty
Snow	2912	$13,906	3.57%
Ice	2535	$15,348	7.12%

The SAD 2000 educational system is comprised of four schools:

Grades K-2 with 228 students
Grades 3-5 with 230 students
Grades 6-8 Middle School with 203 students
Grades 9-12 High School of 373 students

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Method

The Psychological Sense of School membership (PSSM) Scale (Goodenow, 1993) was used to measure belonging. Internal consistency reliability ranged from .77 to .88. The PSSM Scale, an 18 item instrument was administered to the students by teachers in classrooms in April. Two hundred and seventy one (271) students (144 female, 127 male) completed the survey. The breakdown between resident and non-resident was 183 resident and 88 non-resident. Of the 183 residents, 79 were male and 104 female. The non-residents were 48 male and 40 female.

Results

The students at MSSM have a greater sense of belonging, than the students at SAD 2000.

	SAD 2000	MSSM
Total Score	(53.83)	(61.43)
Mean	(2.99)	(3.41)

In looking at some specific items and the percentage of students that reported a high sense of belonging by responding agree or strongly agree, the following items significantly differentiated between the students of the two schools:

	SAD 2000	MSSM
I feel like a real part of my school	37%	71.4%
People notice when I'm good at something	41.4%	67.8%
Most teachers are interested in me	43.6%	78.4%
Have at least one adult talk to about a problem	50.7%	73.4%
People are friendly to me	55%	80%
Teachers here respect me	50.4%	88.1%
People here know I can do good work	46.5%	75.5%
Feel proud of belonging to this school	37.5%	80.0%
Other students like me the way I am	48.7%	74.6%
Other students take my opinions seriously	28.2%	61.3%
Treated as much respect as most other students	46.2%	69.8%
I can really be myself	48.2%	75.2%

The items where the differences were not as extreme were:

	SAD 2000	MSSM
It is hard for people like me to be accepted	18.7%	12.5%
Sometimes I feel like I don't belong	30.8%	32.1%
Teachers are not interested in people like me	12%	5.2%
I'm included in lots of activities at school	39.2%	51.8%
I feel different from most other students	23.5%	27.6%
I wish I were in a different school	26.8%	7.6%

In looking at the breakdown of SAD 2000's students.

There were no significant differences between resident and non-resident students and no significant differences by gender within or across either group.

	Residents	Non-Residents
Total Score	(53.95)	(54.96)
Mean	(2.99)	(3.05)
	Males	**Males**
Total Score	(53.95)	(54.96)
Mean	(2.99)	(3.05)
	Females	**Females**
Total Score	(53.94)	(51.93)
Mean	(2.99)	(2.88)

Even though the difference was not significant the non-resident males feel a slightly stronger sense of belonging (3.05) when compared to resident males (2.99); resident females (2.99) and non-resident females (2.88).

Likewise the non-resident females when compared to all others feel the least sense of belonging.

Conclusion

The students at the MSSM magnet school have a strong sense of belonging, greater than the one rural school it was compared with. It is of interest to the researchers to continue this search, by comparing the magnet school with other rural schools, as well as looking at some inconsistencies within schools, especially related to gender and resident and non-resident status.

References

Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools, 30*, 79-90.